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WRITING IS WORK

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WRITING IS WORK

A SHORT TIME AGO I WAS spending a week-end at a farm belonging to a member of my family. Here and there I saw pieces of furniture which were vaguely familiar: the usual flotsam and jetsam of family life, drifting about from hither to yon, mute and battered reminders of the past. But in this case I came, quite unexpectedly, upon my very first desk.

It had never been much of a desk. It was a very little one; a wall desk, made to close and sitting on four spindly legs. It had sat in the parlor when I was a girl, and I had taken it with me when I married. There was no prophecy about that move, no indication that I was to spend more than thirty years at it and its successors. But there was a shock at its re-discovery. It was in the last stages of decrepitude. Its veneer was peeling, the handles of the drawers were loose, and I may have imagined it, but the list to starboard which had always been a characteristic seemed greater than ever.

I stood gazing at it.

"That's my first desk," I said. "I began to write on it. It always wobbled, and I had to steady it."

It still wobbled. I opened it, and it was a surprise to find it empty. It used to be crowded with bills, the formula for the baby's milk, rejected manuscripts, and one prized letter which said that I showed promise and to try again. Also for several years it contained a small red bank book. The book showed a few deposits, and then, evidently despairing of ever making any more, I used it as a notebook, carefully recording what I sold, where, and how much I received for it. Later on I shall come back to that bank book.

All at once I was back again in that upstairs sitting room, littered with mending, crowded with the enormous black leather chair which was one of our wedding presents, and filled with small children; giving the boys the china clock off the mantel to keep them quiet, taking away from them the scalpels from my husband's office downstairs with which they proposed to operate on the baby's doll, or running madly when an ominous thump-thump told me that one of them was falling down the stairs.

Listening, too, for the postman's ring, and, from the top of the stairs, seeing him hand in the bulky envelope, addressed in my own writing, which told of a story coming back. Taking it with a sick feeling of discouragement, putting it into the desk, and then beginning all over again.

To that desk and its five successors I have been tied ever since. I am not alone in this. Every professional writer has more or less the same record. Nor have I always used a desk. One complete novel was written on a laundry table, moved upstairs in a country house for the purpose; another on a kitchen table in a Maine

cabin, so cold that I worked with an oil lamp by my feet to keep them warm. I have written on trains, in theaters, in hotel bedrooms, and for years in a city office, the first one having been meant for my husband's X-ray room, and having black painted walls. Also I have made profuse notes on horseback, on camel back, under bombardment and air raid during the war, in bed with great regularity, and once on the bank of a *wadi* in Northern Arabia, with the car stuck in the sand and a lookout watching for raiding Bedouins who had killed a woman in the same car and at the same place a week before.

Unusual? Not at all. Only in detail does it differ from the record of any other writer. For writing is work. Only a part of it is done at a desk—or a kitchen table. The writer must take in, in order to give out. His method of taking in may differ from mine, but his necessity is the same. I do not, of course, belong to the stream-of-consciousness school. I have never turned my mind in and let it run riot among my emotions. It has always seemed to me that a good psychiatrist was the remedy for this need of the confessional. What I was looking for was material and incidentally knowledge. I have found both in strange places.

* * *

In the first place, this matter of material is a strange thing. What starts the wheels to working? Where lies the germ of the idea? People are always curious about that. There are two stock questions always asked any writer: How did he start to write, and where does he

get his ideas for stories? Once again I can only speak from my own experience. For the first, I started because I liked to write and wanted to earn some money. For the second, my own work has divided itself into two parts.

One part comes very hard. Indeed, most of it comes very hard. Some ideas have taken two or three years before they ripened into any sort of shape, and even a short story, carefully thought out beforehand, may take a month to get on paper. But once in a blue moon something else occurs. Such an incident happened to me two years ago. I was in bed, resting before a serious operation, and I wakened in the morning with a short story in my mind, complete and ready to write. I sat up in the bed and wrote it that day, finishing at eleven o'clock that night. The next day I went to the hospital, carrying it with me for rewriting. Nurses came and went, but I hardly saw them. I sat up in my high bed, a board on a pillow in front of me and finished it at ten o'clock that night.

It is useless to ask any writer to explain that.

Other stories of course have had a definite origin. On the desk in front of me is the confession of a murder. It is written on a small slip of paper and was found under the telephone box on the floor of a cheap hotel. The woman who ran the hotel had been driven out of town, and when the telephone was being repaired the slip of paper had been found. It reads: .

"To whom it may concern: On the 31st of May, 19—, I killed a woman in my house of sin at —St.,—, I hope you will not find this until I am dead."

She had signed her full name, and, so far as I know, she is living today. The police dug up the cellar of the house, but nobody was ever found. But some time later I wrote a story called *The Confession* from it.

Not all origins are so specific, but all writers know them. It may take time for the idea to germinate. It was two years after I spent some time at a little sick-and-sorry house in Belgium during the war before I wrote from that experience a book called *The Amazing Interlude*. The *Tish* stories began many years ago from the purely accidental meeting with three spinster ladies living together who had been adopted by a strange dog. And a recent *Tish* story, in which she crosses the Atlantic in a blimp, owes its origin to a statement, by some man whose name I have forgotten or never knew, that it was possible to fish for sharks from a small dirigible.

There are other origins equally easy to trace. At the Hofopera in Vienna I saw a little prince fidgeting in the royal box, and a book and a picture—with Jackie Coogan as the prince—was the result. One day in the same city I saw a street called the Siebensterngasse, and wrote a story called *The Street of Seven Stars* from it. And a hideous murder at sea provided me with a book which had the strange result of reopening the case and releasing, on parole, a man from Atlanta who had been imprisoned there for seventeen years.

So much for the origins. What about the work itself?

* * *

Writers who began before the war were trained in a hard school. We sent in our material, complete to the

last semi-colon, got it back or had it accepted at any price an editor chose to pay, and that was that. But it made troupers of those who survived. The phrase that "the show must go on" does not refer only to the theatrical world. The professional writer carries on in spite of hell and high water. And the general idea that when I or any other writer wants something it is only necessary to toss off a story, drives me to fury. One day at my desk would disprove that, as well as discourage those amateurs who see in this profession an easy means to wealth and reputation. I have never been able to be a prima donna. Even had I shown such a tendency I had a happy humorous family which would simply have laughed at me. But the reliable trouper in this combination of art—if possible—business and profession does not throw temperament about the place. He is usually sober and industrious. If he writes humor his expression while doing it is generally that of an individual with a bad toothache. He does not expect to be nursed along by either editor or publisher. If he has a date line he tries to keep it. And always he works.

Not only is life always about, pressing on him with its problems and its incessant demands. It is frequently necessary to work against extremely adverse conditions. In fact, it is axiomatic with most writing people that there are no such things as perfect conditions for work. But even at the best the strain is very great.

For example, recently I finished a long story called *The Wall*. To write it I took notes of all sorts for some fourteen months before I began. In writing the story with pen and ink I did three and, in some parts,

four and five complete versions, an estimated 375,000 words. The completed book ran 120,000 words. The work was done in five months, working from seven to nine hours a day. Then, the day after I finished the story I passed out, and had been two weeks in an oxygen tent before I returned to consciousness. And not too much of that!

This is the work which the writer is supposed to toss off in leisure moments between bridge and trips to Europe. Or when he wants a new car. Yet it has its amusing side. Some seven or eight years ago I was in a hospital, and was visited by a friend who was also a very eminent psychiatrist. He knew my long record of illness and operation; and he sat beside the bed and inspected me soberly.

"Just what are you escaping from?" he inquired.

"Me? Escaping?"

"Certainly you are escaping. From what? Writing."

"Would escape cause gall-stones?" I asked feebly.

"Of course it would. You are escaping from work. You might as well know it."

Well, perhaps he was right. Some writers go fishing. Some divorce their wives. Some take to drink. It is just possible that I escape into gall-stones or an oxygen tent! I do not know. But I do know that now and then I escape into writing, leaving a world I cannot face for a dream world of my own creating. Once, stricken with grief so profound that I felt I had reached the end of my road, I faced work half done, and had to go back to the desk again. I think it saved me.

I can write of that period now. I could not then. The first day, with my pen in my hand, and finally

giving up and putting my head down on the desk. The second day, a few words; to be thrown away because they were undecipherable. And then at last after a long struggle the road opening up again, an escape for a few hours, and the blessed relief of work once more.

* * *

Perhaps that is why writers keep on writing. That and other things. They speak with loathing of their job, but few of the professionals really stop. For one thing, the early urge to write, in time, becomes the habit of writing. We are often miserable at our desks or typewriters, but not happy away from them. And most writers also must earn. It is an uncertain profession, at its best. It does not lend itself to the accumulation of wealth. True, prices are better today. I have already mentioned the small leather bank book, and here I quote the material I sold in those early days, and what I received for it.

Most of the entries mean nothing to me today. I cannot remember them at all. But in that Niagara Falls of work during the first year or two there are a dozen so-called poems which brought anywhere from two to twelve dollars. I remember vaguely only two of them, and they were pretty dreadful. There are also fifty-nine short stories, the earlier ones bringing me an average of twenty dollars, the later ones showing a slight rise. And, some time in that period, I wrote four serials and published them, and two novelettes. I do not remember anything about the novelettes, which is the

way they are listed; but I see that one brought seventy-five dollars, which is certainly all it was worth. As to the four serials, two of them I have forgotten entirely, and have no idea what they were about. The other two, however, became my first two books. One of them, called *The Man In Lower Ten*, brought me four hundred dollars as a serial, and the second, *The Circular Staircase*, five hundred.

Certainly the dam had burst! But I came of a family where my father, its sole reading addict, had had rather fine literary tastes, and I was only a story teller, and barely that. Before my first book came out I warned all my friends that I was bringing out a penny shocker, and please not to read it. When the fatal day came I was hiding on a farm in the country, and its subsequent success, while gratifying, frightened me almost into a fit.

Every writer knows the terror of an unexpected success. How to carry on? How to repeat it?

But, willy-nilly, I had a business by that time, although it was not yet a profession.

One day I went out and bought a large flat-topped desk, moved enough of the children's toys to find space for it, and closed the little wall desk forever.

Things, of course, became easier later on. The boys began to go to school, and I had more time, for one thing. But they were not easy. I knew no one who wrote. I lived far away from New York. I had never heard of a literary agent. The name of my first book publisher was achieved by the simple method of taking a book from the bookcase. And the letter they wrote me accepting the book was read to me over the tele-

phone while I was at the butcher's, the telephone being set out for my benefit among the chops and steaks.

There was much in my favor, nevertheless. There was less competition. Fewer people were writing. And times were good. The magazines were prospering. I often think that I would not care to build a reputation of sorts under present conditions. In those early days I could get an idea while making a cake, write it in the afternoon, get it typed—I had a little Jewish girl who lived around the corner for that—and send the story off the next day. When, or if, it came back, I sent it off again to another magazine. It was as simple as that.

Or was it? I weighed ninety-six pounds. My health was bad. I had a big house with the nursery on the top floor, and the children had everything from measles and whooping cough to diphtheria. Part of that time there was only a general housework girl, and I had the house as well. Not an ordinary house, either. A doctor's house, with offices and telephone to watch and calls to follow up. Any doctor's wife knows what that means, to trace her husband and try to locate him for some emergency.

Nor has it been much easier since. The only difference is that the pressure has changed, not lessened. Small wonder that I have little or no patience with those writers who use temperament as an excuse for not working, and no belief at all in inspiration. I write now as I always have, when I can find the time for it.

I must have been writing for eight years or so before I dared to submit anything to *The Saturday Evening*

Post. It was notably difficult to get into its pages, and its list of great and popular names among its authors put it far beyond me. Then one day I took my courage in my hands and sent the first of the *Tish* stories to it. I had very little hope, but things began at once to happen with astonishing rapidity. The editors not only took the story; they sent an associate editor all the way to my home to see me. Such polishing of furniture as preceded his arrival, such anxiety over the lunch, and what I would wear! And then he could not stay for lunch, and I am sure he never saw the furniture or my new dress. What he wanted was more *Tish* stories, and the *Post* has had them—at intervals for twenty-five years.

I know that this is not the usual picture of the professional writer. He sits calmly and with dignity at his desk or his typewriter, indifferent to visiting editors or lunches or furniture polishing. When he writes he writes, and words become sacred as soon as he has put them down. There are some of us like that, of course; people with such utter self-confidence that every word they write is precious and must remain. But I have never known any. The average writer, especially if he is experienced, is a humble creature, ready to wag his tail at a kind word.

It is usually the dilettante who has the superiority complex.

* * *

I learned a great deal in those early years; that professional writing is a hard, arduous and highly competitive business. The knocks—and there were plenty—

were salutary. There were no advances, and I waited nine months after the publication of my first book for any money to come in. But one thing I did learn through painful experience, and that was to rewrite and then rewrite again everything I did; so that for years, during the progress of any work, I am practically swamped in a sea of yellow paper. Even today my wastebasket sees far more words of mine than the public ever does, and it is only twelve years since, with a novel half completed, I walked downstairs to the furnace and burned the whole thing. True, I took the same idea and began at once another book which did very well. But I had been off on the wrong foot before, and, luckily, I discovered it.

That is not only my own story. It is the story of practically all professional writers. Even at its best, the work is hard on the health. Not all our illnesses are pure escape. Writing requires long sedentary hours and often meals eaten in haste and under nervous tension. Also the work itself is precarious. Article or story or novel, each of us must manufacture a new product each time. If we had shown judgment at the start and manufactured scrubbing brushes, we could probably go on making the same scrubbing brushes indefinitely. We cannot go on rewriting the same story, although some of us are accused of it. Also, once successful, it is necessary to continue producing successes.

That is not as easy as it sounds. Men—and women, too—have been ruined by doing a piece of work so good that it could never be repeated. Also the writer flourishes best when times are static. In rapidly changing times like these he has no fixed background for

his characters. What he writes about today may be entirely altered tomorrow; and this I think accounts for the number of historical and semi-historical books now being produced. The past at least is dependable.

Also he is almost invariably an earner, suffering, like the rest, from depressions. In such times book sales fall off, and taxes take a large portion of earnings. Thus, I may have a good year followed by a bad one. During the bad one when I may not earn at all I must pay the tax on the good one, thus wiping out any chance of saving. While the figures are not at hand, I believe I have paid the Federal government since 1913 at least the equivalent of my entire savings.

Truly the writer is like the man who caught the tiger by the tail and couldn't let go. He must carry on. He is a factory which stops business if he has a headache or tonsillitis; but otherwise he must work, and pretty uncertainly at that. He is lucky in many ways. He has small upkeep, and if his factory starts to ache at least there is no payroll to meet but his own. Also he has no hours. He may work all day or all night. But work he must.

At one time, doctoring a play already in rehearsal for another playwright, I worked practically without a break — and certainly without sleep — for thirty-six hours. And once I did the same thing on a play of my own. I had a thermos of hot coffee beside me, and at eight o'clock on the second morning I wakened my secretary, asleep on a davenport, and gave him the manuscript.

The play was a failure.

* * *

A question often asked of professional writers is as to their methods of work. Personally, I have always thought that Arnold Bennett had reduced that method to a science. He rose at six, with a tea outfit close at hand. He brewed and drank his tea and then went to work. At nine in the morning he had finished for the day. He never rewrote. I have seen some manuscripts of his, and there on his pages, done in a small beautiful hand, a word may be crossed out and another substituted. But that is all.

To me, he was a miracle. When I think of my own confused and often frenzied days, life pressing from all sides, people, clothes, food, letters, business and emergencies, I know that I manage badly. Yet, in case it is of interest, I do try to work systematically. I have no fixed hour for going to my desk, but it is always as soon in the morning as I can do it.

From then until one o'clock there is a theory that I shall not be disturbed. It is largely theory, but I go back, nevertheless, after each interruption. At one o'clock my lunch tray comes. I eat or not. If I am working hard I may take only a cup of coffee. After that I go on until one of two things happens. Either I am writing nonsense or my hand will no longer hold a pen. At the end of a nine-hour day, for instance, I may have to soak my right hand in hot water for some time, and my head feels as though it is filled with mush.

If the evening is free I go to bed, again to make notes for the next day's work; and this may go on for months. During that time I have an almost complete detachment from the world I live in, a sort of armor against distraction. I talk to people, move about, ap-

pear on the surface much as usual. But later on I have only a confused memory of what has happened during that period.

I am quite sure that this is true of all professional writers during any long piece of work.

Nevertheless, I have my own idiosyncrasies. I must have my own pen; a pen so important to me after eight years of use that it is kept carefully hidden lest some absent-minded visitor carry it off. I must use a certain kind of ink. I work badly if there is anything on my mind, from a dinner party to an unpaid bill. And—possibly due to my early experience—I do not work well in a large room.

It may be that this is temperament after all! The fact remains that, having built myself in more opulent times a large book-lined study, for years I was conscious of the room. It was too high, too spacious, perhaps too grand. Some memory of the first little black-walled office must have persisted, and today I am once more working in a small and unencumbered place.

Not long ago I found a writer in the depths of despair. He could not write. It was gone. It was over. I asked him where he was working, and discovered that he had a study the size and general proportions of a hay barn. I suggested a cubby-hole somewhere, and he agreed to try it. He is working again.

I have no explanation, unless it is that, in a small space, one feels more shut away from the active interesting world outside and alone with his characters. Or that the mental inversion essential to creation is somehow assisted by the closing in of walls. O. Henry writing in a prison cell.

This matter of characters is apparently a matter of general interest. People ask where the writer gets them, and if he is honest he will usually say he does not know. Certainly I never drew but one character direct from life, and that was in the very early days. I met a man and later on I murdered him. He had been very kind to me, and I have been sorry ever since.

Actually I think that most writers invent their characters to fit the parts they are to play in the story. True, they change, these people. I have known a villain on my desk to become almost saintly before he left it. This is familiar to all writers, but it is generally the exigency of the story, and not the character walking away with the book, which causes it.

Style is also a subject of inquiry and interest. I know nothing about style, except to have an idea and to present it as lucidly and simply as I can. Writers have certain styles, of course. The staccato individual writes his jerky, staccato prose. The ponderous ones write the long involved sentences which represent their own mental ponderosity. The suave and sophisticated reflect what they are.

In plain truth these hurried days leave little time for style *per se*. People read more and more for subject matter and less and less for quality in writing. It is no time for a Macaulay rewriting one sentence thirty-two times. Which leads rather naturally to what leads to success in writing. Every writer wants that. In fact, he wants two things. He wants to be both the fair-haired child of the critics and to be a best-seller at the same time.

Sometimes, more often in recent years, this happens.

It is no longer considered fatal to all literary craftsmanship to sell a lot of books, or to be a successful magazine writer. The result, however, of this dual objective is hard on the writer himself. He wants both to do the best possible work and also to reach the largest possible audience. The result is a fairly normal condition of discouragement.

There are, as I have already said, some few who are so cocksure of themselves that they never feel it. My own personal discouragement, however, is so keen that it reaches the point of neurosis, and I have never failed to have it. At some time during any given piece of work it overtakes me. The story seems pointless, the writing bad. I am overwhelmed by a sense of futility. I want desperately to quit, and I have a sense of actual nausea at the sight of my desk. But eventually I carry on; and here I think is the distinction, not only between success and failure, but between the temperamental aspirants and the professional group. The first gives up, the second goes back with grim determination and finishes the job.

* * *

It is a curious thing, this matter of creative writing. There are times when the well apparently goes entirely dry. For fourteen months, five years ago, I was as arid as the Sahara. Another time such a period lasted almost a year. I believe it is common to all writers, and, so far as I know, there is nothing to do but wait until the well fills up again. It does, almost invariably. But

attempting to work at such times is like pushing against a closed door. It only closes it tighter.

Then some morning it is over. The creative mind—whatever it may be—commences to function again. The well is full; perhaps it always has been full. The sense of failure passes. The sun shines. When this happens to me my pen is ready, my special ink, the yellow paper, eight and a half by eleven inches, which I find easier on my eyes than white. I turn on the desk lamp—that is another idiosyncrasy; I use the lamp whether I need it or not—state hopefully that I am not to be interrupted, and go happily to work. Back to the job, the blessed, joyous, heartbreaking job of being a writer.

But not only a writer; I must try to be a successful writer. I must reach a wide audience of varied ages and tastes. I must satisfy my editors as well as my public. And, as nearly as possible, I must satisfy myself. I dare say, after all this time, with a long list of published work to my credit—if that is the word—I could go on for a time under my own steam. That is, I am pretty sure of a market for what I write, provided it is not merely words out of the dictionary.

But long ago I decided never to do this. I work harder as time goes on. I have never claimed to be literary, but I rewrite everything, three, four and even five times. I polish more, am less satisfied, more fearful. There must still be the memory of the postman's ring of long ago, and the fat envelope being handed in at the door. As a matter of fact, I probably overdo it. *The Wall*, for example, almost cost me my life. But two rules have controlled my work since I began to find an audience: one is to give it the best I had,

if it killed me. The other, to promise nothing until at least the first draft was done.

For the first of these there is more than the usual pride of any professional. American reading taste has improved. The standards are higher, and there are many people writing well and a few superbly. Then again the old idea that it is necessary to leave the heroine on the edge of a cliff at the end of a serial installment, with somebody ready to push her over the edge, no longer holds. Reader interest is held by characters, by story, or sometimes by sheer brilliance of work.

The other rule, as to writing to order, has always been fatal to me. There are some writers who work better under pressure; but by and large the best writing is done when the writer has something to write and wants to write it. Or—since no writer ever really wants to write—when he can sit down, free and unencumbered, and go through the painful process of putting on paper what was so joyfully conceived in his head.

He may succeed, he may not. For no one as yet really knows how success in writing is achieved. Certainly I do not know, except that I try to interest the reader. In the early days I had two slogans to help me over the tough places. One was that ideas and hard work are the keys to all success; the other was, "Never let the interest die." However, neither one is fully adequate, although both are helpful. I am still uncertain as to where success lies. All I know is that I must do my best to deserve it. If I fail, the responsibility is mine.

But of one thing I am certain. The resort to the more unpleasant aspects of sex by any author as a

substitute for what he lacks in ability or as a medium for success is sure to end in failure. I like honesty, but there are few of the facts of life on which I need or want further information. And I do not like dirty words, in print or out of it.

* * *

As this record shows, writing is work. It is long, arduous and incessant work. It cuts out many of the pleasant things of life. The author lives with one foot in an everyday world and the other feeling about anxiously for a foothold in another more precarious one. And still he cannot analyze entirely either why he writes instead of making scrubbing brushes; or why, having chosen to write, he writes the things he does.

Almost always he falls below even the meanest of his conceptions. I have produced over fifty books, uncounted articles and editorials and have produced seven plays. Every one of them has disappointed me; many bitterly, some less than others. And while no one has ever counted how many miles my pen has traveled, I sometimes feel that the distance should be measured in light years to some distant—oh, very distant—star.

The books have covered about every phase of life I know, and some—like one aboard a sailing vessel, where I placed a bridge where no bridge should ever have been—about things of which I knew very little. But it sometimes startles me to think that I have written so much about murder. I have no criminal side to my nature. I am really one of those people who return books and umbrellas, and insist on giving up my railroad ticket if I am overlooked.

Even most of my progenitors seem to have lived long lives, although there is a legend that the pirate, Bartholomew Roberts, was one of them.

But I have written fifteen books about crime. Not thrillers, which bear no relation to life or plausibility, but stories of murder, committed with normal weapons by people otherwise normal. And I am frank to say that I have had a lot of trouble doing it.

The plain fact is that a properly written and developed crime book is really a novel, plus an intricate and partially hidden plot. The writer, in doing one, has pretty nearly as hard a time as the criminal himself. For not only must the characters be real, the setting recognizable and the crime logical. The intricacy of the plot makes it necessary to hold a dozen or a hundred threads in the mind. In doing one I take notes as I go along, but alterations often make these useless; and also I frequently mislay them.

The result is that, in writing such a story, I do the first draft in a sort of frenzy, for fear I may forget something. My pulse goes up, and I have even been known to run a temperature! I do not know how this sort of work affects the others who do it, but the results with me are pretty devastating. The smallest change, too, in the re-writing may necessitate changes all through the book; and if any one thinks that either easy or funny, one day in my study would show him a haggard wild-eyed woman despairingly searching through mounds of yellow paper for the calibre of a bullet, or tracing the clue of a lost button through four hundred pages of manuscript.

Yet, in its essence, the crime story is simple. It con-

sists of two stories. One is known only to the criminal and to the author himself. It is usually simple, consisting chiefly of the commission of a murder and the criminal's attempt to cover up after it; although quite often he is driven to other murders to protect himself, thus carrying on the suspense.

The other story is the one which is told. It is capable of great elaboration, and should, when finished, be complete in itself. It is necessary, however, to connect the two stories throughout the book. This is done by allowing a bit, here and there, of the hidden story to appear. It may be a clue, it may be another crime. In any case, you may be certain that the author is having a pretty difficult time, and that if in the end he fails to explain one of these appearances, at least five hundred people will discover it and write him indignant letters.

Compared with this sort of writing, even the most ponderous tome looks simple. In fact, it is really the ponderous books which I envy. How easy merely to put down everything you think or imagine. No holding back, no telling oneself that this does not belong, or that. No hewing to the line. No cutting. No fear of letting the interest die. No wastebasket. How wonderful. And how dull!

In some of my low moments—and I have them—I think that writing rather resembles cooking. In other words, almost any one with sufficient determination can cook a roast of beef. But it takes a light hand to make pastry. Of one thing the reader can be certain: the more easily anything reads, the harder it has been to write. There is no such thing as light-hearted spon-

taneous creation, save in the mind, before it is set down on paper.

Even this little book has not been easy to do. It has been written and re-written over a period of days. Now, in the late afternoon, I am finishing this third and final draft. My lunch was a cup of coffee; the cup is still on my desk. The lamp is lighted, and there is a sea of yellow paper around me. Outside there is a busy world passing under the windows, but only now am I aware of it.

This is writing. A world passing by, and some one with a pen or a typewriter trying to put a bit of it on paper.

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